



### **Fuel Break Helps Save Community and Critical Wildlife Habitat**

In July, 2006 the Cibola Fire was started by lightning on the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona. Due to heavy fuels of Salt Cedar, averaging 15-20 feet tall, and dry, hot conditions with temperatures reaching 115 degrees, the fire grew relentlessly, ultimately burning 4,600 acres. The fire ended up on both sides of the Colorado River and affected both Arizona and California.

A mile and a half fuel 100-foot wide break, constructed in 2004, successfully stopped the fire on the southwest corner as it was heading for homes and critical habitat for threatened and endangered species. Without the fuel break, the fire most likely would have damaged structures in the community of Mitchel's Camp and destroyed over 4,000 acres of critical habitat for the southwestern willow fly catcher, yellow bill cuckoo, and Yuma clapper rail.

During the peak of the fire, over 131 personnel were assisting in some capacity with suppression. Because of the volatility and amount of fuel present, the Cibola Fire provided many fire fighters an opportunity to observe the unique fire behavior of a backing fire move quickly and with great intensity. Backing fires in most fuels move slowly and this is the area usually easiest to work with suppression forces.